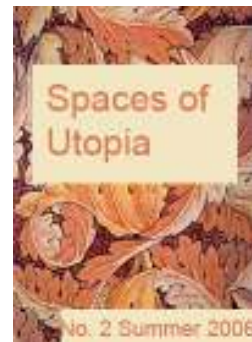


Better than the Book: Fritz Lang's Interpretation of Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis*

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The focus of my paper is to examine Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis*, one of many screen plays she wrote which became the basis for masterpieces reinvented by her creative genius husband, Fritz Lang. For my title, because a screenplay is a written form of the play and therefore book-like, I have taken the liberty to use the term "book" for both the screenplay *Metropolis* she wrote in 1924 and the novel *Metropolis* she wrote in 1926. I am particularly interested in what Lang did not include in his classic film *Metropolis* rather than what he did include, although I plan to discuss key features as well as some of the censored portions of the film to reinforce my thesis. Fritz Lang revealed to one of his interviewers, Henry Hart, in 1956 that he "had done considerable work on the [*Metropolis*] script", but he "took no credit for it. The script credit went to my wife [Thea von Harbou]" (Grant 2003: 13-15). Von Harbou's novel appeared one year prior to the release of Lang's film. Even though von Harbou was identified as the screenwriter in the film, Lang called her a "scenarist" in an interview years later (*ibidem*).

Perhaps, due to the multiple changes Fritz Lang made of von Harbou's original screenplay, she may have thought that her original message: "The mediator between brain [capital] and hand [working class] must be the heart" (Ott

1986: 80) was not fully incorporated in his film. In fact, Lang gave the stock Communist disparagement of *Metropolis* when he repudiated *Metropolis*' thesis that "just as the heart mediates between the brain and the hand, so the tenderer emotions will mediate between a proletariat and a managerial oligarchy of the future" (Grant 2003: 14).

It should be noted that *Metropolis* is identified in Tom Gunning's *The Films of Fritz Lang* as "the albatross around Lang's neck, condemned, or at least partially condemned, by critics and film-makers" (Gunning 2000: 52). Gunning assiduously strives to find justification for *Metropolis*'s longevity; he identifies *Metropolis* as a film "received as a postmodernist work in the 1980s" (*idem*, 52-53). According to Gunning, postmodernists possessed "a new sensibility" which "embraced [*Metropolis*'s] blend of kitsch and monumentality, mechanical sexuality and over-the-top melodrama", as well as powerful political critique matched by utopian reconciliation (*idem*, 53). Gunning did not mention the dramatic changes Lang incorporated into von Harbou's script to make it more appealing to the mass audiences. For example, the final intertitle spoken by Maria to Freder immediately before the final scene enables the Master of Metropolis, his father, Joh Fredersen,¹ to join hands in a mutual handshake with Grot, the Workers' foreman, succinctly states, "There can be no understanding between the hands and the brain unless the heart acts as mediator" (Lang *Metropolis* film, 2002). Lang changed von Harbou's more biblically referential ending statement, "For the knowledge had come upon them that it was day, that the invulnerable transformation of darkness into light was becoming consummate, in its greatness, in its kindness, over the world" (Lang 1973: 131). Lang positioned the actors to show the reconciliation that was "enabled by the heart, Freder, the Mediator, between the head, Joh Fredersen, mega-industrialist, and the hand, Grot, the workers' foreman. Gunning identified the ending as "cartoon solutions" (Gunning

2000: 53), perhaps implying the unrealistic utopian implications; however, Gunning did not deny that all scenes were conveyed through exquisite sets and masterful visual style (Murray 1990: 100-101). Gunning pointed out that:

In the postmodernist context, *Metropolis's* contradictions could be seen, not as an inherent flaw, but as the sign of a work divided against itself (a fissure attributable, claimed many, to the Harbou/Lang collaboration – with the good due to Lang and the bad to his Nazi wife). (Gunning 2000: 53)

Perhaps the over-explicit, highly literal nature of *Metropolis* is what makes many viewers, trained to hunt out subtle meanings and internal symbols, so uncomfortable (*idem*, 56).

It is the condemnation by German censors and the additional cuts made specifically by playwright Channing Pollock and others in the American version to which Lang responded when he spoke poorly of his film *Metropolis* during several different interviews (see Grant 2003: xi). Even though the film originally was over budget when it was released,² more than a quarter of the film was drastically cut by Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft [Ufa] for its international release and for its secondary release in Germany (Gunning 2000: 53). Just two days after the Ufa's executive committee had been formed in 1927, it acted to remove intertitles from *Metropolis* that committee members judged to “promote ‘Bolshevism’ and to have communist connotations” (Murray 1990: 63). Since there was no copy of the original release preserved, my paper is based predominantly on cuts made for the American distribution of the film in which the original German cuts had already been completed (Gunning 2000: 53). Luckily the von Harbou's script provides an idea of what is missing since the original film was never duplicated. Some of the American cuts were restored when the film was shown a second time in Germany after its financial failure in America (Bergfelder *et al.* 2002: 132-133).

In a 1975 interview with Gene D. Phillips, Lang admitted that “after [he] finished *Metropolis* [he] didn’t much care for it” (see Grant 2003: 180). Lang realized that even with all of his editing of von Harbou’s script, her message “The heart must be the go-between of the head [symbolically representing capital] and the hands [symbolically representing labor]” (see *ibidem*) is not the exclusive answer to solve social problems. He saw both the film and book as being philosophically muddled (Lang 1973: 10). Von Harbou did not have the reconciliation scene in her novel. In fact, Lang totally omitted the third woman whom von Harbou included in her novel, Fredersen’s estranged mother who has always opposed her son’s work. In von Harbou’s *Metropolis*, it is Hel’s letter entrusted to Fredersen’s mother that is used as the finale. Hel wrote a biblical phrase, “I am with you always, and until the end of the world” which Fredersen repeats as if it were stressing its apocalyptic prescience: “Until the end of the world... until the end of the world” (Gunning 2000: 83). Lang even stated more strongly that [he] “thought the worker moving the hand of the giant dial in *Metropolis* was “too stupid and simplistic an image for a man working in a dehumanizing, mechanized society” (see Grant 2003: 181). Years later the general public argued with Lang’s self-assessment of *Metropolis*. After reassessing his imagery, he realized the prescience of the dial-moving segment when he saw a similar activity while watching astronauts on television. He saw them “lying down in their cockpit constantly working dials just like the workers in [his] film” (see *ibidem*).

Though the spirit of the film was high during the depiction of the dramatic love story progressing through *Metropolis*, perhaps Lang envisioned the truncated version as a diminishing of ‘spirit’ from his film. Lang claimed that the technology of motion pictures must have ‘spirit,’ a meaning, a significance. This was a common claim by German technicians and engineers from the Weimar into the Third Reich. German technology was identified as superior to other nations because it was

based on spiritual values (Herf 1984: 18). Even when Hollywood producers were enticing German film talent to work in the United States and most journalists emphasized Germany's gratitude for U.S. assistance, they bemoaned the consequences for the German film industry. One headline on 9 January 1926 reflected the concern of the diminishing spirit inherent in German cinema by posing the question: "Amerikanisierung der Ufa?" ["Americanization of Ufa?"] (Bergfelder *et al.* 2002: 133).

Lang's initial assessment of his film does not correlate with others such as the accolades in an anonymous American industrialist's letter revering the film's message correlating head and heart (Grant 2003: 14-15). As a director, Lang disliked theorizing about cinema. In various interviews, Lang frequently stated that there are "no theories" for film making and that he had "none to offer" (see *idem*, xi). However, Lang does claim in some interviews that he was influenced by expressionism. In fact, Fritz Lang's last silent film is a highly stylized, architecturally striking classic of the German Expressionist movement. I find it fascinating that though he denies being an expressionist, and especially that he claims he didn't "know the difference between an expressionist and a non-expressionist *mise-en-scène* [productions]" (see *idem*, xii). I think it is also interesting that he feels his cinematic creations should belong to the realists. This may be evident in his assessment of his work. For example, he never repudiated the sets and décor of *Metropolis*, only the film's subject matter. He especially stresses this in a Godard interview in which he stated that he "produces what [he] feels" (see *ibidem*) and he uses psychology in his understanding of characterization (Lang 2002: DVD). This dramatically reflects Rudolf Kurtz's initial definition of expressionism in his book, *Expressionismus und Film*. Kurtz defines expressionists as using "*Die Psychologen, Asthetiker Historiker des Begriffs*" [psychology, aesthetics and

history as concepts] and “*Nuchternen Definitionen*” [somber definitions] (Kurtz 1965: 9).

Instead of stimulating critical thought and encouraging audiences to contemplate democratic forms of social interaction, expressionist-style films drew attention away from everyday reality, focused it on psychological phenomena, and promoted an irrational, conservative, and sometimes even apocalyptic world view. *Metropolis* seems to have benefited from Lang’s previous film making experience. In *Metropolis*, Lang fused the expressionist concepts of obedience to a strong authoritarian figure, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, (Lang 1919: DVD) with the revolutionary activity as seen in *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (Lang 1922: DVD). Lang also focused on the duality between modern science and occultism, the science of the medieval ages which was incorporated in the Rotwang’s laboratory that contained everything from retorts and vacuum lines to pentagrams and a witch ball suspended from the ceiling over the transformation table (Lang 2002: DVD). Even the “young people”, with whom Lang frequently spoke, explained their appreciation for his message in *Metropolis*. They told him that they “all hate the establishment” and “our computerized society” because “it has no heart” (see Grant 2003: 180).

In Thea von Harbou’s 1924 screen play revised by Lang, as well as her novelized version in 1926, Freder, the protagonist, needs some motivating factor to wrench him from his golden life as the heir apparent, male child of the New Tower of Babel’s Director, Joh Fredersen. Von Harbau presented Freder as high born, privileged golden child who partied with the other wealthy youth. Lang focused on the duality of human nature which fascinated him. For example, in order to depict the dual nature of men, Lang juxtaposed the working class with the privileged class. The dual implication of the intertitle, “The Day Shift” is used to show first, von Harbou’s “living food [that] came pushing along in masses...Men, men, men – all in the same uniform, from throat to ankle in dark linen, bare feet in the same

hard shoes, hair tightly pressed down by the same black caps” (Lang 1973: 20). While von Harbou insisted that [workers] “planted their feet forward, but did not walk” (*idem*, 20-21), Lang used his artistic acumen, as indicated in his stage directions, to depict the day-shift filing in “at a rapid shambling walk, while the outgoing shift comes slowly out at half speed” (*idem*, 20). Von Harbou named the never-stopping Heart machine, the Pater Noster, a name Lang uses for most of the machinery used to run Metropolis. One of the multiple film cuts was the intertitle, “Deep as the workmen’s city lay underground, so high above it towered the Masterman Stadium, gift of John Masterman, the richest man in Metropolis” (*idem*, 22). Again this cut reflects the negative implications of capitalism and therefore undesirable for the American audiences, according to the censors.

Included with the cutting of this intertitle are the scenes connected with the complete foot race of what von Harbou identified as the “Club of the Sons” (*ibidem*). Von Harbou wrote of the “Club” as “more a district than a house” and a place that “embraced theatres, picture-palaces, lecture-rooms and a library” as well as race tracks, a stadium and the famous ‘Eternal Gardens” (*ibidem*), all that remains of this notion on film are the scenes from the Eternal Garden, a few clips from the race track and the men’s club where *die falsche Maria* [the false Maria] dances (Keiner 1984: 91). One of the very short segments of the “Club”, the race has some of the intertitles such as “But athletics were not the only diversion of gilded youth in Metropolis” omitted (Lang 1973: 23). Just the brief view of the freely racing, white-silk clad, young men makes the viewer aware of the separation between the oppressed, darkly dressed working-class men, walking head bent in the “bowels of the earth” physically and visually contrasts with the frolicking work-free men in the New Tower of Babel.

Just as the men are presented in terms of contradiction, so too are the women. To emphasize his observation of human duality, Lang introduces multiple

layers of contrast. We first view the working oppressed men and then we see scenes of the relaxing privileged men. In contrast, we first view the women of the privileged class men whom von Harbou identifies as “handsome well-trained female servants” (Lang 1973: 25). I find it interesting that Lang has many women vying for Freder’s attention whom Lang depicts as Freder’s social equals while von Harbou identifies the women as being commodities for the “Sons” rather than individuals from the same social status. While von Harbou’s women in the Eternal Garden were dressed “With their bewildering costume, their painted faces and their eyemasks”, Lang altered their resemblance to von Harbou’s “delicate dolls of porcelain and brocade, devised by a master hand, not purchasable but rather delightful presents” and lightened their wardrobe fabric to a more gossamer effect (*idem*, 24). By doing so, he added an element of raw sexuality, presenting some of the girls’ bare backs to the camera and including some “naked breasts covered by a diaphanous shawl” (*ibidem*) to add an element of duality soon to be witnessed even more dramatically by the audience between the girls in the Eternal City and to quote von Harbou, “the austere countenance of the Virgin. The sweet countenance of the mother” (*idem*, 27). Lang interprets von Harbou’s description of Maria’s “deadly severity of purity” (*ibidem*) with a costume featuring a large white collared, simple dress which is not described by von Harbou. The style of the dress is Puritan with front closure bodice.³

To accentuate the duality of men, Lang uses some of von Harbou’s description of women frolicking around Freder in the “Club of the Sons”. This is an important image to show the various levels of desirability. Before Freder begins his quest for Maria, he is shown as someone desirable by other women as well as compatible to other men. Furthermore, Freder is given the emotional quality associated with the heart as seen by many gestures in which he places his hand or hands on his heart to indicate his feelings. I find it interesting that several scenes

with Freder engaged in water play with the Eternal Garden women were expunged from the film. These segments were more theatrical than essential for the message of the film, even though water symbolically has implications of purification.

As an enhancement to von Harbou's screenplay, in Lang's film, the social divisions, which were visually emphasized, dramatically illustrated the split between the upper class "brains" of the city or the mental aspect and the lower class "brawn" of the city or the physical part which has predictably evolved by script's futuristic year 2000. One group of people, those above ground, retains only their brains, while another, those people who live below ground level, in the Worker's City, uses only their muscles. These extremes are geographically and pictorially presented with views of the rulers cavorting freely in pleasure gardens on the surface following scenes of the drudge worker columns shuffling, heads hanging, to and from their boring, strenuous jobs. The contrasts offer stark images of Man's duality. Maria functioned as an Eve in the Eternal Garden, bringing knowledge to the privileged "Sons" of what von Harbou identifies as "little ghost-like skeletons, covered with faded rags and smocks" (Lang 1973: 26). The dichotomy between the sheltered wonderkind sons of the mega industrialists contrasted with the reality of the effect of their fathers' empire on the children spawned by the masses of workers below. It is Maria who brings the two types of men together showing them as "brothers"; they are complementary parts of a single organism (Lang 1997: 10-11).

Because of Maria's first-hand knowledge of the horrors experienced by the working class, she understood the "truth" of the city and enlightened Freder by introducing him to the below-ground laborers who made the huge Metropolis function. Von Harbou's vision of casting the character of Maria as a political force in her screenplay was reduced in Lang's film to envisioning Maria as a shepherd of

children and a preacher of “truth”. As Maria stands in the doorway of the Club of the Sons, the Major-domo and the servants [“flunkeys” as they are identified by Lang (*idem*, 29)] surround Maria and the defenseless children. All we see is Maria turning and retreating through the large art deco doors of the Eternal Garden. Here there are a few intertitles that have been cut by either Ufa or American censors. One intertitles holds Freder’s question to the Major domo, “Who was that?” and the Major domo’s dismissive response, “Just the daughter of a worker”. Perhaps the implication of a worker’s daughter seeking to equalize the “sons” seemed too reflective of Communism for the censors. Later when her mechanical clone is created, the female image becomes a diabolically deadly fem-fatal. It seems to me that by having the false Maria initially wear the same white collar Puritan dress worn by the true Maria, implies that the duality of a woman’s nature lies below the surface of her clothes.

In von Harbou’s epigram to her novelized version of *Metropolis*, she clarifies that her tale is not “intended as a simple prognostication of the future, but as a figural commentary on the present” (Gunning 2000: 53). The action in the novel takes place in 2026 AD, although the actual date is omitted (or has been cut) in the film. Von Harbou stipulates that “This book is not of today or of the future. It tells of no place (...) It has a moral grown on the pillar of understanding” (Von Harbou 1963: iii). Since she specifically mentions “no place”, perhaps she views *Metropolis* as a utopian community; however, I view *Metropolis* as the allegory of the future triumph of the machine. Even though the workers are incited to sabotage the “Great Machines”, the ending implies a continuation of the city whose pulse is measured by the throbbing of Pater Noster machine. Von Harbou’s novel had a more intricate drama-horror theme with a strong female heroine, Maria. The biblical tale of the Tower of Babel retold to the workers underground by Maria functions primarily as a political parable about class and power divisions,

introducing Maria's central theme, "one of the oldest in the history of allegory", according to Tom Gunning, "the city-state as a human body, with workers conceived as 'hands' and planners as 'brains'" (Gunning 2000: 57). The key point alludes to the basically Communistic premise of a required workforce; however, in *Metropolis*, the laborers do not understand the city architects' noble motives, and only experience the pain of their own enslavement. This is not the Marxist-Leninist version of a classless society in which capitalism is overthrown by a working-class revolution that gives ownership and control of wealth and property to the state (Encarta Internet). In contrast, the city architects' lack of awareness of the workers' suffering is briefly recognized through the two desperate groups' communication, as a breakdown of the primal word 'Babel' into opposed meanings for each class. Von Harbou expatiated in her novel:

"Babel!" shouted one, meaning: Divinity, Coronation, Eternal Triumph!
"Babel!" shouted the other meaning: Hell, Slavery, Eternal Damnation!
(Von Harbou 1963: 66)

Only "Babel!" appears on the intertitle placard. But Lang uses trick photography to make the word appear to either look like it is oozing sweat or possibly blood. Through his cinematography, Lang was able to ingeniously present an interpretation of a word that took von Harbou several pages to elucidate.

In Lang's film, he dramatized von Harbou's re-reading of the Tower of Babel and depicted the breakdown of the unity of labor. The powerful image of the workers revolting and surging up the stairs toward the speaker reflects the ironic antithesis Lang's visualization of von Harbou's slogan inscribed above the future city: "Great is the World and its Creator. And Great is Man" (Von Harbou 1963: 66). Von Harbou never questions the division of labor, in her screen play or her novel; she deems it "natural" that the "hands" and the "brains" have different tasks. Many of these allegorical figures were commonplace conceptions of Weimar

culture which was deeply embroiled in a debate on the nature of technology and political power. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* declared that the center of the "artificial and complicated realm of the Machine is the organizer and manager. The mind, not the hand, holds it together" (Gunning 2000: 64). The idea that the working classes simply needed to be informed of the planners' ideals to become contented, predicts the role of propaganda as a major agent of social change and consensus. Like the biblical triangle between man/ woman and the snake, von Harbou uses a male/female triangle of Rotwang, Hel [Rotwang's former lover who was won over by Fredersen and became his wife] and Fredersen to instigate the fall of *Metropolis* and another male/female relationship of Freder and Maria to rebuild the city. Even though many of the cuts involved the female role, just enough was included to tantalize a male/female interest in *Metropolis*, the film. In an interview with Jean-Luc Godard, the French movie director, Lang called himself a romantic and stipulated that his definition did not mean sentimentalism. He saw romanticism as a key to which to view a film through the director's heart, his desires, and everything the director loves (see Lang 1963: DVD).

One prescient and chilling part of von Harbou's screen play deals with a worker, who like other workers in *Metropolis*, is identified with a number.⁴ Several of the scenes with Georg, worker 11811, were deleted from the film. Intertitles including "Why was my son allowed to go into the machine rooms?" spoken by Fredersen to his secretary, Josephat, and "Why did you go down there?" spoken by Fredersen to Freder, were omitted perhaps because they illustrate the enormous chasm between the supervisors and the workers. The communist overtones implying all men can be equalized are evident in a series of cut scenes including the intertitles, "It was their hands that built this city of yours, Father". Spoken to Fredersen by Freder and the father's response, "But where do the hands belong in your scheme?". Also Fredersen's oppressive response to his own

question, “In their proper place – the depths” implies anti-entrepreneurialism which is the antithesis of capitalism. Freder switches clothes with 11811, thus elevating the male worker to golden son status and reducing himself to worker status. Unlike with Lang’s treatment of different personalities of Maria in the same dress, the cliché “clothes make the man” is appropriate for the scene with Georg and Freder. Ironically, Freder who represents the moneyed upper class cannot resolve the inequitable state of *Metropolis* because his father attempts to confine him in his quarters. Therefore, Freder has to send a representative worker as his spokesperson. The Marxian theory in which the class of industrial workers’ only asset is the labor they sell to an employer is refuted in this scene; however, two scenes later, 11811 disobeys Freder’s request to go to a trusted employee, Josephat’s apartment, when Georg finds money in Freder’s pockets. Instead of listening to Freder’s directions, Georg takes a diversion and goes to Yoshiwara’s,⁵ a decadent “Sons” Club. If Joh Fredersen, Freder’s father, had not acted like the autocrat, spying on his own son, 11811 would not have been caught by Slim, Joh’s spy. All of the spying scenes with Slim following 11811 were expunged from the film. Perhaps the implication for using subversive methods such as spying to keep children (or others) in their proper place was not approved by the American audiences. Another intertitle, “What will you do if they turn against you some day?” was expunged from the American film. The fear was that such insinuations could cause unrest among workers. One intertitle that was altered, with the meaning left intact was Joh Fredersen telling Josephat “You are dismissed. Go to the G bank for the balance of your wages”. The “You are dismissed” sentence was removed in the American version. Perhaps the economic times would have made the harsh reality too uncomfortable to achieve entertainment value.

Because the role for Maria was profoundly reduced in the film, the female actress who played Maria also was the voice of “The Machine Man”, “Death”, and

“The Seven Deadly Sins”. My conjecture is that this was not an accidental casting. As Gayle Fornataro illustrated in “Beyond Utopia: An Exploration of Gendered Textual Spaces and Political Ideals”, the feminist and/or psychoanalytic analysis of utopia seems anything but ideal. Fornataro argues that “women’s relation to language in a patriarchal symbolic system” aims at the concept that utopias focus on the “exclusion of female difference and desire” by “abjecting the semiotic⁶ aspect of language, which alone enables their expression”. This is reflected in *Metropolis* as well. For example, after Rotwang transforms Maria into the Machine Man that is incorrectly translated from *Maschinenmensch* [Machine Human], the robot becomes a fully functioning automation which can be programmed to perform a variety of human tasks, while its appearance can be synthesized to resemble any human being. One inflammatory intertitle omitted from the American film states “The copy is perfect. Now go down to the workers and undo Maria’s teaching; stir them up to criminal acts”. Lang illustrates mob hysteria but with the many scene cuts, the film blends the true Maria with the false Maria. Freder, after chasing to Rotwang’s house and hearing Maria cry out, confronts Rotwang with “Where is Maria?”. While von Harbou describes one of the scenes with detailed description of Maria being found by Freder in Fredersen’s arms about to kiss him, only the word/ name “Maria” appears on three additional intertitle placards. Because utopias are structured around specifically masculine desire and imagery, the female fem-fatal is an appropriate antagonist. Lang depicts this as the “robot’s brazen gaze” and this scene eventually results in Freder’s collapse.

It is interesting to note that the scenes depicting the highly sexually charged lascivious dance performed in a nearly nude costume by the false Maria in the guise of the Whore of Babylon in the Yoshiwara Club with the lecherous, leering fathers and sons vying for her attention are included in the film; however, scenes with Hel,⁷ the woman who embodies Rotwang’s wife, Fredersen’s lover, and

Freder's mother were expunged. Apparently the name "Hel" was thought to be too sensitive to expose American audiences to. In fact, Lang's interpretation of von Harbou's *Metropolis* reflects a powerfully masculine reading of her screenplay. Even though there is a strong female in the film, Lang suggests that the struggle with industrialization is a male issue that is merely enunciated and exacerbated by Maria and her mechanical clone. It is not too divergent from Plato's construct regarding "utopia" as emphatically and undeniably a masculine concept, a masculine dream based upon an exclusively masculine form of desire, with no place for woman. Utopia means "no where", and according to Plato, women are no where in it. It is my conjecture that because Lang was using his wife's screenplay, the female character, albeit reduced in dimension, remained in the film. While von Harbou emphasized the false Maria's skill as inciting lust "in every soul in the room", Lang used the robot Maria's dance to appear as part of Freder's delusions. To further emphasize the disillusionment of Freder, Lang included the intertitles "Joh Fredersen is looking for an excuse to use violence against the workers" followed by "Maria, you always pleaded for peace – but now the robot in your likeness has been commanded to incite the workers to violence"; however, they were omitted in the American version because they may have fomented worker unrest and precipitated violence.

Another violent image that von Harbou included and Lang enhanced is the "grotesque figure of Death". Von Harbou had Death swing "his scythe" and cause "a rain of stars" to pour "down from the sky" (Lang 1973: 90), while Lang included figures of the Seven Deadly Sins and choreographed their movements from the Catacombs to interaction with each other and back to the Catacombs where the true Maria professed her philosophy and where false Maria fomented unrest. Apparently the image of Death wielding its instrument of destruction did not offend the sensibilities of the American audience, according to Pollock, but the statue of

the scientist's dead lover who left him to marry the Master of Metropolis and lost her life giving birth to the Master's son was too offensive to include in the expurgated version.

Lang finds it difficult to conceive of a man who has everything, really understanding a man who has very little (see Grant 2003: 180). Perhaps if Lang wrote the script alone, C.A. Rotwang, the creative scientific genius, Joh, the industrialist genius, and Freder, the next-generation genius, would have been the only characters in the film; however, because von Harbou wrote her screenplay featuring a strong female, Maria, Lang included her as the catalyst and lust interest necessary to enable Freder's transform from an idle rich "Son" to the heart of the mediation between the head and the hand. Rather than keeping her in the role of von Harbou's firebrand orator and socially-conscious thinker, Lang enhanced the sexuality of the false Maria. For the benefit of film sales, it is common knowledge that sex sells; however, none of the lusty scenes of the men leering at the false Maria's exotic dance were kept in the American version. The conundrum that presents itself is that if women need to find a new direction, and a visionary director such as Lang is providing a visual vehicle for a female's screen play, von Harbou's in this instance, the masculine interpretation of a woman's work leads to a possible assessment that unless a woman is continuously behind the camera lens, it seems that feminist utopia is an impossible contradiction in terms. Another difficulty was as Gunning mentioned:

Von Harbou does not truly seem capable of thinking through (or accepting) any of the scenarios offered by her material: the resolution of the Oedipal complex, the Christian sacrifice, or the workers' revolution. Instead, imagery of breakdown and chaos dominate. (Gunning 2000: 71)

Even with the implication that women did not get a fair presentation in Lang's *Metropolis*, Lang was able to take von Harbou's screenplay and take

scenes such as the near final scene where “Rotwang climbed up the ladder, dragging the girl with him, in his arms” and actually depict the drama involved in the male character treating a female character as if she were a commodity available for his possession. The issue of children is also interesting in *Metropolis*. The intertitle “Joh Fredersen’s son has saved your children” was amended to “Your children have been saved”. Perhaps there was some question of Fredersen’s motives for reconciliation if those negotiating would think that the only reason Fredersen wanted to settle the dispute between capital and labor was so that others would react to “Save my son!” as a repayment for Freder saving their children.

Metropolis is a film that though possibly cohesive in its original form, became fertile ground for censorship on many levels. Lang’s “high art” of the film “raises the artistic stakes a few notches” (Bergfelder *et al.* 2002: 65). Even though *Metropolis* now only exists in a version which distorts Fritz Lang’s and Thea von Harbou’s original intentions; compared to the premiered version, the content has been changed in places beyond recognition. Kracauer attributes the censorship and massive editing of *Metropolis* to its role as a “youth film” that “affirms fixation to authoritarian behavior precisely by stressing rebellion against it” (Kracauer 2004: 162). Furthermore, Kracauer stated that Thea von Harbou, “was not only sensitive to all undercurrents of the time, but indiscriminately passed on whatever happened to haunt her imagination. *Metropolis* was rich in subterranean content that, like contraband, had crossed the borders of consciousness without being questioned” (*idem*, 163).

Reconstructed versions of the film have been deduced from the script, as well as the censorship notes for the first version and the surviving original score by Gottfried Huppertz. While von Harbou focused on the more problematic tendencies and a melodramatic treatise on capital and labor in both her screenplay

and her subsequent novel, Lang developed his trademark style apart from von Harbou and he always insisted on his own vision of cinema and claimed he never adapted to popular tastes (Bergfelder *et al.* 2002: 223). Also, Lang was able to utilize his considerable directing skill as well as his art and architecture background to mold a film whose remaining scenes are so carefully recorded that it endures as a classic in spite of all the cuts from various quarters that have excised von Harbou's the central conflict depicting the rivalry between the inventor, Rotwang, and the tyrant of Metropolis, Joh Fredersen, for Hel, whom they both loved (Aurich *et al.* 2001: 118-119). In von Harou's screenplay, Maria, acting on an appeal from the Workers' wives, calls on Freder to be a mediator. Lang, however, has the all women except Maria retreat totally into the underground and background so that the final scene has the men looking on as Maria entreats Freder's help to unite the trinity, bringing together the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit of the Worker. The intertitle states:

Head and hands want to join together, but they don't have the heart to do it. Oh Mediator, show them the way to each other.

Freder, the child who caused so much pain to Rotwang, death to Hel and hope for Fredersen, emerges as Mediator at the heart of the film's metaphorical plot which continues to keep its figurative finger on the pulse of popular interest.

Notes

¹ It was common practice for film makers to “borrow” from other commercially successful films since the audiences liked to view not only the same stars in different pictures, but similar themes as well; therefore, Kaiser’s billionaire in his Gas Trilogy: *Die Korall*, *Gas I* and *Gas II* (1917-20) may have been an influence on the creation of Joh Fredersen. According to Fredrick W. Ott, “The purifying power of sacrifice, the belief that through destruction a new humanity will arise and the prophetic dream of brotherly love, all set forth in Lang’s film, bear a strong resemblance to the work of the playwright George Kaiser” (Ott 1986: 76).

² The overspent budget drove UFS into the red and ultimately into financial dependence on Hollywood corporations according to Gunning’s “Metropolis: The Dance of Death: The Allegory of the Machine” in *The Films of Fritz Lang* (Gunning 2000: 53).

³ Puritan clothing for women had the bodice buttoned all the way up the front, whereas Lang’s design had the bodice laced which later added a more alluring look to the false Maria as she gyrated with various gestures.

⁴ This is chilling since this is the method which Hitler employed fifteen years after this film was shown. Numerical identification of concentration camp victims took away their names and tattooed numbers on their forearms, thus removing their humanity and reducing them to machines.

⁵ Yoshiwara means Good Luck Meadow and was a famous red-light district established in Edo in the early 17th century; an area that is more camouflaged, but where sexual services are obtainable, still exists in present-day Tokyo, Japan.

⁶ The term “semiotic” was coined by Julia Kristeva to mean the facet of language that is oriented and structured around the mother’s body.

⁷ Several sources are indicated for the name Hel. Hel (realm), the realm of the dead in Norse mythology and Hel (being), daughter of Loki, ruler of Hel Hel, Poland, a town.

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